

## EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION: A STUDY ON MONPA WOMEN OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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**Abstract:** Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power. Empowerment of women and improvement of their status, particularly in respect of health, political participation and economic opportunities is of highly important. Women need to be empowered in order to become strong and ready to take up new challenges for building up of the family, society and the nation. Education is the means to empower women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the developmental process. This paper is an attempt to investigate the obstacle in women education and impact of education in empowerment of Monpa women in Tawang district. The “Monpas” are the habitant of district Tawang which is situated in westernmost part of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering China and Bhutan.

**Keywords:** empowerment, participation, tribal community, literacy.

**Introduction:** Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power. Empowered person is one who is able to exercise control over decisions that affect his/her life. Empowerment of women and improvement of their status, particularly in respect of health, political participation and economic opportunities is of highly important. Women need to be empowered in order to become strong and ready to take up new challenges for building up of the family, society and the nation.

Education is the key factor for women empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Education is the means to empower women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the developmental process. Education is important for everyone, but it is a critical area of empowerment for girls and women. This is not only because education is an entry point to opportunity but also because a woman's educational achievements have positive ripple effects within the family and across generations. According to experts at the National Conference on women in minority communities, organized by the India World Foundation and the National Commission for Women 'Not just literacy but education is the key for women empowerment'. (Choudhuri,A and Saikia,A 2010) education is an important tool for women empowerment. It can make women strong enough to survive and be empowered to face all challenges of life. (Devi,P 2012) education has high influence in women's life in employment, participation in decision making, right and judicial awareness etc. It is only education through which the problems of rural as well as urban women empowerment can be solved and social equality can be possible. (Henia,A and Gassah, L.S 2008) Education helps to protect rights, fights against exploitation and discrimination, giving knowledge, skill and self confidence. Future

prospects of women depend on economic, social and legal changes being made that will promote the access of women to education.

**Study Area:** Arunachal Pradesh is situated in the easternmost part of India, bounded by Republic of China in North, the state of Assam in South, Myanmar in east and Kingdom of Bhutan in the West. In Arunachal Pradesh formal education started only after independence. Till 1947 there were only two formal educational institutions in the state. The literacy rate of the state was below 1 percent. Prior to independence, traditional education was imparted through Buddhist Monastery in the western part of the state. However with the attainment of independence the new era of educational progress and development started. The literacy rate of the state as per census 2011 is 67%. The Monpas are the habitant of Tawang district which is situated in westernmost part of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering China and Bhutan. According to census 2001, the population of Tawang district is 38924 of which 21846 are males and 11160 are literates. Similarly, the total number of females is 17078 out of which 4177 only are literates. At present, there are 57 primary schools, 23 middle schools, 4 secondary schools, 4 higher secondary schools as on 31-03-06.

**Objectives:**

1. To study the status and obstacles of women education in Monpa community
2. To study the impact of education in social and economic empowerment of Monpa women

**Methodology:** The present study falls under the descriptive survey method of educational research. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. A questionnaire of 35 items in 2 sections, regarding the obstacles for women education and impact of education in social and economic empowerment of women were developed by the investigators and presented randomly to 64 Monpa

women between the age group of 18-40 yrs of Tawang district. The respondents were from different economic status and educational levels.

Level of Education	No of respondents	Employment
No formal education	16	Housewives/farmer
Primary	17	Housewives/farmer/daily wage laborer
Upper Primary	09	Anganwadi/ ASHA/small grocery shop
Secondary	14	Clerks in Govt offices/small business/village panchayat
Graduate, Post graduate	08	Teachers/Govt officials

### Findings:

#### Status and Obstacles of Women education in Monpa Community:

Prior to 1950, there was virtually no school in Monpa area. Only the monks and nuns had the privileges of learning Buddhist scriptures in the monasteries and nunneries respectively. It was only at the dawn of fifties, the government opened schools in these areas. They started enrolling students in a large scale, motivating the parents and giving incentives to the students. These incentives are still given to them. Besides free education, they are given free textbook, hostel, uniforms etc. In spite of all these facilities, the literacy rate of girl students is not satisfactory. According to Educational Statistic Report 2008-9, the female literacy rate of district is 47.3%. This reveals that more than 50% Monpa woman are still illiterate. There are many obstacles for women education in Monpa society such as illiteracy of guardians, poverty, lack of awareness and social barriers for women. Besides this, it was revealed from the survey that negative attitude of parents towards girls education is a biggest obstacle to girls' education in Monpa society. Many parents view educating sons as an investment, because the sons will be responsible for caring for their aging parents. Parents see the education of daughter as a waste of money because daughters will ultimately live with their husband's family. Sometimes it becomes difficult to get a groom if the girl is highly educated. Another barrier to women education is lack of adequate school facilities. Many schools in the villages do not have enough classrooms to accommodate all students. The classrooms that are available often lack of basic necessities like furniture, sanitary facilities or drinking water. Lack of female teacher is also an obstacle to women education. Girls are more likely to attend school and have higher education if they have female teacher.

One of the major obstacles in women education is engagement of daughters in household and agricultural activities. Daughters in rural areas are

treated as helping hands for their mothers. Even if they are sent to school, they have to take along their younger's to school with them and they are more likely to be withdrawn from school if necessary.

#### Impact of education in social and economic empowerment of Monpa women:

It is found from the survey that education has positive impact on social empowerment of Women as 95% women responded that educated women will have greater voice in decision making and are respected in the society. 3 (three) panchayat members among the respondent responded that it is because of their education that they have a say in the panchayat meetings. All the graduate respondents responded that they are confident and take right decisions of their life. 65% respondents who are illiterate to primary school, are either dependent on their husbands or parents for taking any decision.

Regarding impact of education on economic empowerment of Monpa women it was found that respondents who are illiterate to primary school are either housewives or daily wage laborers whereas, those who passed upper primary or secondary are employed in government offices, running small business and some of them are members of village panchayat. When the education level is upto graduate and post graduate, most of women are employed and have self confident. It was also revealed that the illiterate women are mostly housewives; they are contributing in household works like, cooking, taking care of children, looking after elderly people etc. Which are generally are unpaid and unrecognized.

**Conclusion and Recommendation:** Education is important for everyone, but it is an important area of empowerment for women. This is not only because education is an entry point to opportunity but also because a woman's educational achievements have positive effects in the family and across generations. The importance of tribal women's education is certainly great. It can help them to free themselves from traditional captivity and gender discrimination.

In other words, real empowerment of women can be achieved through education so that they can participate in the social activities as equal partners.

Some of the recommendations for education and empowerment of Monpa women are:

- Teachers and teacher educators need to be trained for gender sensitization.
- Community mobilization to enroll out of school girls should be carried out. Retaining and enhancing the learning ability of the girls already in the schools will be important initiatives. Though, the state government under gender cell, SSA is taking up this programme, but more initiatives needs to be taken in this area by involving NGOs and social workers.
- Awareness campaign, workshops and seminars should be arranged at the village relating to women education and empowerment.

- Interaction programmes with other empowered women in the society should be arranged to motivate women.
- Provision for Non-Formal education programmes and health care services particularly for the women in rural areas must be provided.
- Vocational oriented courses and training should be organized for economic empowerment of women.
- Counseling and career guidance units should be establish and activate to motivate women to take up different courses.
- Finally, to encourage the education of women at all levels: schools, colleges and universities should be established exclusively for women in the tribal state like Arunachal Pradesh, as there is no separate institution for girls in the state except the KGBVs run under SSA.

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